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ABSTRACT

This classroom research project focused on 10 fifth-grade students, all of whom had been labelled low-average achievers by their school. Students were encouraged to read, write, draw, talk, tell stories, and play freely. Five case studies emerged from the interactions. It became apparent that the children were shaping literature to their experience of the world just as their experience of the world in turn was giving a definite and powerful shape to the literature. To be contrasted with the traditional belief in the need to move underachievers into the mainstream are two alternatives: (1) transforming the vision of such children as part of the mainstream; and (2) transforming attitudes about story-making to view it as another form of literacy no less important than reading or writing. Educators must move from the notion of teaching children to become more like the teacher to teaching children to grow more as themselves. (SG)

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Toward Greater Equity in Literacy Education:
Storymaking and Non Mainstream Students

Presentation for the 14th Annual Boston University
Conference on Language Development, October 13, 1989

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The names of the children in this study have been changed to protect them against the mislabeling that often occurs in situations of ability grouping.

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TOWARD GREATER EQUITY IN LITERACY EDUCATION:
STORYMAKING AND NON MAINSTREAM STUDENTS

Several years ago, when Shirley Brice Heath was studying the different voices of Trackton, Roadville, and Maintown children in a Western North Carolina community, I found myself studying the language and literacy patterns of children only several hours away. Teaching teachers about the writing process at that time, I decided I would go back to the classroom both as teacher and learner, in order to have more authentic things to say.

Each day promptly at 10:00, I rushed home from my university teaching, grabbed my tape recorder and headed for an elementary school nearby where I had been given a room and ten fifth grade students--low average achievers, as they were described, since the school was structured by ability grouping. I hoped to see how literature and literacy were intertwined. And since Heath had indicated the need for schools to bridge the gap between classroom and home of the underachieving child (1982) and Rosen (1984) had indicated a need for schools to incorporate more narrative events in the classroom, I began wondering what would happen if children's storymaking were not only encouraged but cultivated in this setting

"What does a narrator learn in the act of telling?" Rosen had asked, and I began to wonder too, as I met the children each day during their regular reading time. The weeks passed; the children listened to stories and poetry. They read, wrote, drew, role played, talked and told stories, as they interacted with one another and with me. And they had freedom to compose and transmit their ideas in the language they brought from home, since I soon began to see that personal identity could shape, as well as be shaped by, the classroom setting when home and school culture were allowed to merge.

The only trouble was that when I completed my study and began sifting through the data, I saw very little as far as "products" went. What I had captured on tape seemed to outweigh by far what the children had produced on paper. Had I lost sight of my goals somewhere along the line, when I allowed talk and storytelling to flow so freely in my classroom, I wondered?

Several years passed. At certain times I thought back to that class and tried to make sense of it, but the data continued to overwhelm me. It seemed perhaps nothing of value had been generated by my research; yet I knew that the children had been excited each day as they came to class. Their achievement test scores had even risen eight weeks later when they returned to their regular class. So why was I not able to generate any theories out of it all? Why was it that every time I thought back to the class, not words but pictures--scenes of story and of children engaged in storymaking--came into my mind? Pictures that seemed to be holding their words for the telling, while, in the darkroom of my mind, stories were slowly developing.

Reading those pictures now, several years later, I see better what it was that children taught me--and even I little of how I taught them. Slowly I have come to see that sometimes products are so deeply embedded within the learning process, we nearly miss them.

PICTURE ONE: STEVIE; THE RESIDENT ORNITHOLOGIST

A picture that is emphatically etched in my mind is Stevie sitting one day in a small circle of classmates, role playing the character of Sam, from E.B. White's *THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN*, a book I had been reading aloud because Sam was keeping a journal the way we were doing. My own journal entry for that day led me to initiate the role play activity. I thought it might take us all deeper into the story, especially into the character of Sam, who had begun to puzzle me:

I'm thinking about Sam and wondering why he didn't tell his father what he had seen [the swans]. Was it because he was afraid his father would want to come with him to see the swans and he wanted to keep them all to himself? Or was it something else? Was he afraid that his father thought the swans might hurt him in some way or that he was going too far away and would get pulled into the swamp like quicksand? I just rechecked this in the book and it said Sam liked to keep things to himself and he liked to be alone. Maybe that's it.

It wasn't "it," as it turned out. The children had much to teach me, as they worked through the activity in drama.

Role playing seemed to me to be an effective way to induce what Labov (1972a) has called the "evaluative" element of talk or story, or the means used by the narrator to indicate the "point" of the story. Here I decided role play might allow children more freedom to express how they really felt about the story if it functioned as a classroom device for recreating strong emotions in order to spawn narrative--the way Labov (1972b) had devised certain questions to elicit narrative so that he could see how people talked when they were not being "systematically observed" (209).

I therefore stepped back from the children's storymaking intentionally this day to give them more room to turn around in--in stories. And I can still see, from across the room where I was standing, Stevie slipping easily into the role of Sam, saying what he thought Sam would say, feeling the knowledge of Sam primarily because he had this knowledge. Sam loved birds--and so did Stevie, who loved reading and writing about birds and especially drawing them. He had in fact become resident ornithologist of the class by this time. And he did "know," I shortly discovered, why Sam didn't tell his father about the swans. He "knew" Sam's father would shoot them because of the grill, he said. (Sam's father in Chapter One was frying fish.)

"He'd cut off its head!" Stevie said with obvious emotion. "He'd think it was a duck!"

"Yes!" agreed Tonette. "Everytime my father goes hunting, he shoots the first thing he sees."

Shaping Sam's experience to their own experiences, Stevie and Tonette enabled me to see more of the child's world: the antipathy for adult oppression of the animal world, the suspicion of adult bungling, the empathy for the swan as potential victim, perhaps evidence of their own feelings of being often powerless and oppressed as all children at times are--and more particularly, as underachieving children whose language, opinions, and experiences were often devalued in classroom contexts. And storymaking in role had allowed their particular view of the world, their "evaluation" of story to emerge safely, as well as to be superimposed on story as a separate lens which didn't distort the literary picture but instead enriched it, when they were allowed to respond to literature through their own storymaking.

PICTURE TWO: TONETTE AND STEVIE; THE BIRD IN THE TREE

The influence of White's book was still evident a few days later when as class began with the children working in pairs reading and responding to one another's journals, the tape record (left accidentally turned on) picked up a conversation between Tonette and Stevie. Later that day, as I was replaying the tape, I saw once again the advantages of freely composed narration in the classroom for eliciting the "evaluative" element in talk and story.

Speaking of what she had written in her journal that day, Tonette began retelling for Stevie the story of what happened the day before when she left for school. But she was not just telling; she was, as the ensuing dialogue shows, searching for a plot behind the "story," attempting to find the causality behind the time sequence of events.

- Tonette: He came back and he had a biscuit in his mouth and he dropped it and he flew back up in the tree. When I went out the gate, he came right back. When I turned around, he flew back up in the tree again.
- Stevie: He scared.
- Tonette: He had a biscuit in his mouth. Why'd he drop it?
- Stevie: He dropped it and he flew back up in the tree?
- Tonette: Uh huh.

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Stevie: Because it too heavy for him. It was going to be too heavy for him and if he thought it was going to be so heavy, then by the time he got back up in the tree, he may hear himself a shot; then he be dead. That's why he dropped the biscuit and after you left, he went right down and got it.

Tonette: That's what I did after I got out my gate and got halfway to the busstop. I turned around and the bird, he were walking like this [pantomimes]. He were way over here to the trees.

Stevie: He knowed that by the time you get back in the gate he'd be up in the tree and get his biscuit and flew out.

Tonette: But he ran away when he saw a dog coming after him.

Stevie: Dog eat birds too. Was he a stray dog?

Tonette: I don't know what a stray dog is.

Stevie: Was anybody behind him?

Tonette: No.

Stevie: Well, he was looking for something to eat. He wasn't going become the breakfast of a German Shepherd.

Tonette's puzzlement, her information seeking takes a new turn here, and now with plot to some extent in hand, she searches (with Stevie's help) to fuse the "what happened" of story and the "why" of plot, in a second "chapter."

Tonette: When I got to the busstop, he flew up in the tree but something happened and there was a baby up there and the baby fell down. What do you think the dog would do to the baby?

Stevie: He would be the breakfast of the dog. Dog would eat the bird.

Tonette: He didn't.

Stevie: Did he get in your gate?

Tonette: Yes. He saw that bird; then it flew up.

Stevie: How'd he get in your gate?

Tonette: By the door. He walked in.

Stevie: You sure he saw that bird?

Tonette: He saw the bird when it fell down. He got close to it to see it. Then he saw what it was. He ran back out the gate.

Stevie: Something must have distracted him and he ran away.

Tonette: That was an ugly bird.

Stevie: Did he see where it landed at? He just saw it fell out of the tree?

Tonette: Yes.

Stevie: How you going see something when you ain't know where it landed at?

Tonette: Cause the bird ain't the same color as the grass and the grass is dry. You can easily see where the bird is, Stevie.

Stevie: Did you see the bird?

Tonette: Yes, he saw the bird.

Stevie: Where it fell at?

Tonette: Yes.

Stevie: He saw where it landed at?

Tonette: Yes.

Stevie: Something must have distracted him. He didn't want it anymore.

Tonette: He probably chasing my cat.

Stevie: You got a cat?

Tonette: Uh huh.

Stevie: That be the cat that he saw. And he chase him.

Nothing in this transcript produces a "product" in the traditional sens

The tape reproduces a chance "happening," recorded when the children are conversing about a subject totally outside the teacher's agenda. There is nothing on paper. Why then do I remember it? Perhaps because of the sense of personality that emerges through the exchange of voice, in this case, the special and totally unselfconscious vernacular voice.

And what a great deal of learning--and teaching--is going on too. Notice how Stevie manages to explain to Tonette, easily and quickly, with a subtle questions, what a stray dog is (and he does so without causing her to feel self conscious or ill informed) and how he causes her to extend her statement to explain how she identified the bird in the grass. Sorting out (analyzing a question), presenting a story as they "make" a story, Tonette and Stevie read each other as they "write" for each other a new version of the scene they are piecing together, a situation not dissimilar to what Bruner (1986) describes as the way we tell stories to create workable theories for explaining the unexpected.

Such narratives, he says "once acted out, 'make' events and 'make' history" because they "contribute to the reality of the participants" (42). as they do here when both children reason their way to an answer through recounting a story of what happened to Tonette (or what happened to the crow). And even though the story here is in only one sense literature (the child's own created literature) and in another it is only in one sense "writing" (the child's "scripting" of what happened--and why), once again literacy emerges in evaluation or the "why" factor of the story, when personal experience is translated into dramatic form.

Left on their own, Stevie and Tonette began to sort out the relationship between two events: 1. a crow seeing Tonette, dropping a biscuit, and flying up to the tree; and 2. a baby crow dropping out of a tree and a dog of both the crow and the dog. And in sharing a story between them, they were able to explore ways of integrating something from an old context into a newer one.

resolving incongruities) without fear and without frustration. Instead, for the best possible learning situation, they felt challenged to work through the question, for as long as it took them to reach closure.

And why were they able to do so? First possibly because, as children of a cultural oral tradition, they were working in a medium that they were comfortable and familiar with (talking to tell a story). And this medium of talk actually served to strengthen the creative experience. As Friere (1989) says, in speaking of the "spoken" book he produced with Antonio Faundez:

The experiences we talk about, discuss critically, and which are now being recorded [in dialogue form] on tape will come out in a lively, free spontaneous and dynamic conversation . . . The style is different [although not less serious in intent nor less rigorous in thought] because the language is spoken--with a more colloquial touch, more feeling, more freedom (3).

Second, because the talk was spontaneously produced in dialogue form (rather than written independently with the children switching to mainstream formality), the tonal patterns preserved the language of content; the linguistic form, remained fused with the speech event itself. Thus the natural power or strength the children had to describe their experience was not diminished; their values and beliefs were not lost in the "translation." In a multiplicity of roles (student/teacher; language user/ language elicitor; speaker/listener; "reader"/ "writer"), they satisfied the urge to create meaning that sets any literary (or literacy) process in motion. Ideas generated language and language generated more ideas. Third, they were each responding to the similar and self motivated purpose and intention of the other. As Donaldson says, "we enjoy best and engage most readily in activities which we experience as freely chosen. We do not like being controlled; we like controlling ourselves" (118).

PICTURE THREE: TONETTE; DEVIL OF ME!

Tonette was a child who did not like being controlled; at the same time

she often seemed to fear her own loss of control. Walking around the room one day after I had read a chapter of Beverly Cleary's DEAR MR. HENSHAW, I glanced down to read her journal entry, one filled with drama, energy--and purpose:

Dear Diary,

Today I got so mad that I needed some water to cool off. But no, the teacher wouldn't let me. I felt like slapping somebody. I almost did. she asked me a question and I answered it, but I still was mad. I was so mad that to me my face was getting really hot. I felt like knocking this whole school down. I felt like hitting Deena but I didn't cause Deena's my friend. Are you? [Deena wrote "yes" in the margin.] Now I'm terrified to knock the school down. Boy, I need some water to cool down. Devil of me. I almost broke my pencil.

Glancing at Tonette's journal entry, I saw nothing at all about DEAR MR. HENSHAW or Tonette's underlying feelings about the book. It was only in telling me the story behind the story of the entry (in producing a meta-story), as class broke up that day and we had time to chat, that she went deeper into her feelings to verbalize them (the power of language to generate thought). "I listened to the story for one or two minutes," Tonette told me

and then I got bored with the story and I told you I didn't like that story and you said, 'uh huh' and I said I was getting bored with both this one and THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN, and I said, could I go get some water. And you said no. And that made me madder cause I was so mad that I needed some water to cool off so I put the cover over my head and Stevie started complaining with me for kicking him and then I told Stevie I weren't kicking him and then nobody believed me and that made me even madder and then it was time for a conference and you and Hattie were talking and I had to get some more water and I had to wait for at least two or three more minutes to do it and the me and Deena went and got some water.

A "story," Rosen (1984) tells us, refers to an "actual sequence of events, real or supposed" (33). This Tonette presented in her journal entry. The "narrative discourse," he adds, "is the framed text in which these events are reported." This Tonette began presenting to me at the end of class. "And story," he continues,

presupposes the existence of other stories. For both reader and listener threads of connection exist, threads of many different kinds--shapes, devices, signals, echoes, explicit references and, more generally, a sense of how a story belongs with others as a verbal act (33).

Thus what we might formally have labeled as "digression" in story-⁹telling, Rosen sees as a kind of "seeding" within stories, a series of "embedded" stories within stories or "potential" tales (37) that never really happen or move to the foreground because the speaker is "uncurling" another pattern. In the classroom context, however, I discovered this day that these embedded stories can be unfolded for richer learning of both teacher and student. That day, for example, Tonette and I continued to converse, with Tonette consequently going even deeper into her feelings about the book: "I hate the notes with everybody writing notes about Dear Mr. Henshaw this and Dear Mr. Henshaw that . . . Like every day he is reading a note and you're always reading the note. And that note is BORING!" What would she rather read, I asked? "A play or something," she answered. "A poem or something." Thus talking with me, telling me the story of her feelings (our narrative discourse) had enabled Tonette to see a system that contained options and enabled me to formulate hypotheses about these options I didn't have to read an entire book aloud. We could read parts of stories and stories they chose for the reading. We could talk about stories--or simply talk.

One of the liveliest storymaking sessions emerged when I asked children if anything ever bothered them--as the boy in Cleary's story had been bothered by so many things. And after they told their stories (aired their grievances), they began talking about and sorting out options in their own lives. (If they were bored in or out of school, what else could they do?) The devil in Tonette had altered my perception of literature in the classroom. Not long afterward, Mona's response to Arnold Adoff's TORNADO POEMS caused me to see even more.

PICTURE FOUR: MONA; GODS IN THE SKY

I can still see the illustration from Adoff's book that I began showing

the children two days after a tornado had hit our town. We had spent time talking about the devastation; the children were filled with their own stories and experiences, their own traumas. I thought the poems, after all the talk, would be a profitable learning experience, relevant and therapeutic. Mona's response was a surprise.

"God will get mad at you for writing poems about tornadoes. And I believe that!" she told us. Her viewpoint was a new one to me--and fascinating. As the children began talking, I listened carefully. "It's none of our business," she continued. Stevie's response: "He wanted it none of our business." From Cory: "Mona said it ain't our business. But it is when you in one." Again from Stevie: "He wanted it here when He wanted it." From Cory: "Hey, it don't matter us to know about no religious stuff like that." And finally Mona: "Hey, I go to church now!"

It interested me that there was such a range of viewpoints here and that the children were using classroom conversation to affirm and deny meaning for themselves--a critical state of thinking. I wanted to know more. "Could you write about a rainbow?" I asked. "That would be something that appeared in the sky too, wouldn't it?" Mona answered: "Yes, but a rainbow can't kill you." (If the phenomenon appeared to be the expression of an angry force of nature, the danger of retribution seemed to be much greater.)

"Is that man [Adoff] still living?" Mona asked several times, as we examined the book. She seemed less hesitant to hear poems about tornadoes than to write such poems herself. The action of creation appeared to be the threat. Her posture and stance toward the book, however, showed clearly that she chose to remain uninvolved. She would not allow the poems into her world to shape it, to change her perceptions; her experience of the world at that time precluded it. (And to have pushed the literacy process upon the students at this time, which might have happened, had the freedom of classroom talk not evoked this discussion, would have been highly counter-

productive.)

It is true that Mona and her classmates had written easily in their journals about the tornado. However she drew the line at the point of a patterned response, a notion that still gives me pause. And that is why my picture of this day is one from Adoff's book--a picture of words he had shaped like a tornado (a funnel shaped cloud.) How much those words taught me that I surely didn't expect to learn, as I set off from home that morning.

But another picture is also fused with that one, a picture of what I still remember seeing--or imagining--that day as I was walking home. The sky was dusty and it became darker and darker, the wind blowing harder, as I walked the short distance. It seemed the tornado was going to curve back on us, take out its wrath on me for introducing Adoff's poems in class that day. I liked the feeling Mona's ideas had given me new feelings of mystery and terror I saw in the sky now, where before all had been simply logio-scientific phenomena. The mythic-poetic-narrative and the paradigmatic modes were swirling side by side in my mind now as I hurried home.

Seeing beyond the picture of the book page that day to a culture that colored the children's responses to literature had given me a new way to view life and literature (and tornadoes). And one that has never left me. Instead of imposing my own mainstream culture on these children, I moved back allowed them through talk and story to move forward to teach me more about themselves and their belief system. My sense of story and of life was strengthened and broadened as a result.

And no child taught me more than Cory. In fact, looking back through my notes now, I see that even this day, he was giving me, inadvertently, an answer to my question about Mona. I had gone, during that session, to introduce a comparison between hurricane and tornado shapes, an idea that caught the interest of Stevie and Cory and took us all off in a new direction. "When it say 'funnel shaped cloud,'" Cory said, speaking of

Adoff's poem, "it's expressing how the cloud is shaped."

"He makes a picture within a picture, doesn't he?" I replied.

"A hurricane covers a lot of space. It whips over a big area."

"A tornado rotates," said Stevie. "In one area," added Rob. "It's smaller, but powerful," said Stevie. "Like a poem," said Cory.

Poetry is powerful. And perhaps Mona's decision not to create her own poetry in response to such an inexplicable force as a tornado was in reality her intuitive sense of the strength of the human imagination and the force of retaliation such a vital human act might provoke.

PICTURE FIVE: CORY: THE DEVIL IN ME

When I consider the strength of the children's imaginings in this class, it is a collage of pictures I see, many of them centered around Cory. There is Cory during the first week of class reading aloud his journal entry, an embryonic story that was later to "seed out" into so many other stories:

We were checking our social studies worksheets and I was thinking about being Michael Jackson and I was walking past the graveyard with Ola Ray singing 'Thriller' and I turned into a monster and started dancing with the other monsters.

There is Cory telling stories about imagining riding his bike with his brother, going down a hill too fast, and crashing. There is Cory telling a dream one day of sleepwalking and seeing his brother looking at him like a demon. "I wanted to do something bad," Cory said. He liked playing monster in his fantasies but in his dreams, when his brother played monster, he became frightened, and fear caused him to want to do something "bad" or to fear something bad happening to himself or his brother, as with the bike accident.

There is Cory telling of falling asleep one night thinking of how bad he had been since he was "little," always "beating up on my little brother," he said. "I was thinking of the devil coming and getting me," he added.

Then finally there is Cory, creating a memorable story of his own. Aided by two questions I asked, one that I borrowed from Labov's strategies for invoking the dramatic involvement and thus the emergence of the vernacular voice (1972b):

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you were in severe danger of being killed--where you thought to yourself, 'This is it' (93),

and another that began emerging for us as we read and talked about Pa's stories in Laura Wilder's *LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS*,

Have you ever been really frightened and found out that you were just imagining it?

Cory began spinning a story which projected a similar sense of mystery and fear as in Wilder's, a definite sense of dramatic involvement, a story filled with the vernacular voice (filled also with adumbrations of Michael Jackson's "Thriller") and many elements of child culture generally.

Of greatest importance, however, as he told the story, with all its borrowed and blended sources, was that he appeared to be using story for what Rosen (1984) calls a cognitive resource--a meaning making strategy:

Don't you know that thing about me beating up my brother yesterday? I thought I saw the devil? Well, when I was seven (this is true), my brother was doing something. I was choking my brother and slapping him like when you beat up somebody, and I went to bed, and a fox was on me. And I took a flashlight and I tried to beat it. And it started to bite me but I wasn't bitten and I started punching it and biting it. I got out of the bed and I said, 'Jody, wake up, please.' And he didn't wake up. And I went in there with my grandma. I said, 'Grandma, there's a fox on me. Ahhh!' And I got under the covers and my grandma beside me and the fox was up there on the bed beating me in the head, and I yelled, 'Get off of me! Get off of me!' . . . Then I see a shadow in the hallway. There's only one light on and that's the hallway light. And my brother came in with horns sticking out of his head. And he said, 'Hey Cory. How you doin? How come you beat up on me last night?' . . . I ran outside. I yelled, 'Help! Help! Somebody help me! All these devils after me!' . . . And I ran outside and across the road . . . I called the police. And I say, 'Somebody in that house trying to get me . . . Policeman says, 'I'll walk you back to that house to see if anybody's in there.' And he walked me back home. Then he put me back inside, said 'See you later, Cory.' He looked like the devil too. Then my daddy came out and I said, 'All you all doing is teasing me.' And I went back to bed AND THERE WAS THAT FOX AGAIN! Everything came back again. The same thing happened.

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to me again. My Mama came in there. Big eyes. Big yellow eyes. Look like demon eyes. She said, 'Wake up Cory. It's time to go to school . . . Wake up Cory.' I woke up and my Mama was standing there. It was about 7:00 in the morning and I found out I wasn't dreaming but some of it was dreaming like my brother coming out looking like the devil . . . I just saw that stuff like the fox . . . My Mama said, 'See that? It show you not to be mean and beating up on your little brother. That's why I tell you stop beating up on Jody or something going to happen to you.' My brother said, 'Yeah, something going to happen to you!' My brother said, 'Yeah, something going to happen to you!' That's all I remember about that.

With literature as catalyst, talking and storytelling allowed Cory to shape personal meaning from his dream, to explain it to himself. It set questions in motion and provided more answers to the questions. telling the story did not answer all questions, of course, could not resolve all issues for Cory; for as we see here, he shouldered a great burden dealing with conflicts of sibling rivalry, aggressive human tendencies, fears of hurting a younger brother (coupled with his mother's anxiety that a younger child will be hurt), as well as with cultural influences, such as songs and videos, and biblical stories, that foster the fear of (and fascination with) demons and devils.

But in the telling he found a way of interpreting his own behavior to himself in a way he might not have been able to do otherwise. And because the story he produced had form and meaning, conflict, suspense, and resolution, it was as much literature as the stories he had read in books. We heard it that day, later read it when it was transcribed and bound as a book, as any piece of literature, to discover what Cory had made of his experiences and what we in turn could make of them too. It is a circle. We make literature and literature helps to make us, helps us to puzzle out the ambiguities, the complexities of life. It causes us to know. That is its purpose I think. And my purpose as a teacher, I see now, was emerging, strangely enough, in those moments when I stopped teaching the children to read literature and became a listener to the literature they were themselves making.

I began by thinking literature would be a bridge to literacy. Looking back I see now that talk was the bridge, and poems and stories (orally told stories, not just written ones) often became the literature. I went into the classroom wearing both the teacher's and the researcher's hats, but soon found myself bareheaded as a learner when I became so immersed in the children's talents and initiative. So I stopped everything, my teaching, my research, my reflecting, even my writing--to listen. Not because I was puzzled (my usual researcher's hat) but because I was impressed. Consequently I allowed storytelling to emerge whenever it did and responded to the surprises and discoveries it offered--with appreciation. And that may be why the children's test scores were higher at the end of the year. "If we do not genuinely respond and value the children," says Donaldson (114) "I am afraid they will come to know. But if we do value the children, they do know."

The last time I saw Cory, I was teaching another group of fifth graders, and I invited him, as a sixth grader now, to appear as guest storyteller the day before Halloween. Cory could leave his regular class this day, his teacher said, but only for twenty minutes--and no longer. "You must leave the dance early, like Cinderella," I whispered to Cory, as we went walking down the hall that day. But once immersed in his storytelling, Cory captivated his audience for 45 minutes--definitely staying too long at the ball!

Cory's teacher saw him as a child "at risk," one of her students most in need of skills training for the statewide proficiency test in writing he would be taking later that year. And the question becomes, how can teachers help non mainstream children who, as Heath has shown, often perform unsuccessfully in school because a non mainstream culture causes them to use language and see things at times differently from the way mainstream parents and teachers expect children to learn and perform?

Should we concentrate more in classrooms on the logio-scientific, paradigmatic mode, the one Heath indicates that mainstream children are immersed in from birth but that non mainstream children have less knowledge about? Do the two modes of paradigmatic and narrative, on the other hand, need to be balanced so that non mainstream children can exercise the mode in which they are more proficient? Or as an even more radical move, should the balance tip at times, in favor of story? Would there be any advantage to placing more storytelling in the classroom? Or would underachieving children as storymakers enjoy their time at the ball, then at the stroke of midnight-test-time find themselves back in their disadvantaged linguistic "rags"?

CONCLUSION

Bruner (1986) speaks of story as enabling speakers to construct simultaneously two landscapes--that of action and that of consciousness, whereby those in the act of telling know, think, and feel, and a psychic "reality" dominates the narration (14). Cory's stories especially showed me these two narrative landscapes. He and his classmates showed me they were shaping literature to their experience of the world just as their experience of the world, in turn, was giving a definite--and powerful--shape to the literature. My own perspective was changed as a result.

Thus it seems to me that Cory's teacher in her concern for making Cory literate sacrificed an important key to literacy when she set storytelling aside as an expendable frill. Perhaps she even weakened the power of literacy itself, if we consider that Cory and his classmates were actually "writing" their story of the world through their telling--and their social experience, their home language, their cultural norms and taboos were not silenced. In a trusted environment, they spoke freely--and taught me.

In our teaching then a failure if storymaking pushes writing at times to the sidelines? Traditional status quo thinking may produce a yes answer. If we are to move non mainstream children out of the under-achieving cycle (and up the economic ladder--with better "grades" and ultimately better diplomas and jobs), the reasoning will go, the children must be placed in an apprenticeship role, in order to master the mainstream discourse. But two alternatives to this kind of thinking remain:

1. Transforming our vision of the status quo to one that prizes the culture of non mainstream children and accepts it as part of the mainstream, equal in importance to our own traditional definition of what is "right" and "good" or "literate." In other words, we could broaden our own discourse base by apprenticing ourselves to non mainstream populations at times--to their cultural norms, their social experiences, their native languages.
2. Transforming our attitudes about story so that we see it as another literacy, a third literacy (the first literacy?), no less important than reading and writing, instead a fundamental need for shaping learning.

Heath's study has helped us to see that we must change classrooms to help non mainstream children adapt to a society that prizes the paradigmatic mode. Her study, however, has also enabled me to see better that we haven't yet really utilized the talents of all children. Isn't it reasonable to assume that mainstream children will lose something valuable if they are not helped to cultivate the narrative mode in which non mainstream children have supposedly been immersed from birth? Don't the stories of Cory and his classmates tell us that all "streams" of children could profit from the discovery learning of storymaking and dialogic classroom talk?

And what is a non mainstream child anyway? I found that in listening to Mona and her classmates discussing the tornado that even with a subject as supposedly simple as a cultural "norm" or taboo about the weather, there was strong divergence, and this divergence became all the more apparent

when children began opening up to talk and to think more about the subject. Even with a group so supposedly cohesive or "similar" as this one, there was still a great deal of difference in participatory, interactive style, in ways of telling a story, and in reconstructing literature. So how do we define a mainstream child really? Have we come even close to understanding this term? Or have we been simply--and conveniently--classifying students in order to design new teaching strategies, without really, or fundamentally, changing ourselves or our feelings about people?

Today we need to find ways to transform classrooms which involve what children do in these classrooms, yes, but which take into consideration first how we really feel about these children and what they are outside these classrooms. If we really want to enable all children to participate as equal and responsible members of the classroom culture (or the culture at large), no matter what the "stream," we must first find ways to transform ourselves. We must move from the notion of "I taught children and they became more like me," to "I listened to children and they grew more as themselves."

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